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## Rural Crime and Police Reforms: A Study of Christie's Murder Mysteries

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### Abstract

#### Keywords:

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Agatha Christie breaks conceptual ideologies that country houses witness a fewer number of crimes compared to towns. With rapid industrialization and an economic boom in the nineteenth century, Britain witnessed a social transition that widened the income disparity between classes. The country recorded a substantial increase in illegal activities in the post-industrial era. To curb criminal activities, the British authorities took measures, including expanding the network of security agencies and reforms in the police system. Besides, Britain introduced the policy of criminal records maintenance for the territorial understanding of criminal offences. Christie has not explicitly described these policies and reforms in her novels, but the plot structure, the location of a crime, and the proactive approach of police detectives indicate the blending of reality with fiction.

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## Kırsal Suçlar ve Polis Reformları: Christie'nin Cinayet Esrarları Üzerine Bir İnceleme

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### Özet

Agatha Christie, taşra evlerinin kasabalara kıyasla daha az sayıda suça tanıklık ettiği yönündeki kavramsal ideolojileri yıkıyor. On dokuzuncu yüzyılda hızlı sanayileşme ve ekonomik patlamayla birlikte İngiltere, sınıflar arasındaki gelir eşitsizliğini derinleştiren bir toplumsal dönüşüme tanıklık etti. Ülke, sanayi sonrası dönemde yasadışı faaliyetlerde önemli bir artış kaydetmiştir. Suç faaliyetlerini engellemek için İngiliz yetkililer, güvenlik teşkilatları ağını genişletmek ve polis sisteminde reformlar yapmak gibi önlemler aldı. Ayrıca İngiltere, cezai suçların bölgesel olarak anlaşılması için adli sicil kayıtlarının tutulması politikasını uygulamaya koymuştur. Christie romanlarında bu politikaları ve reformları açıkça anlatmamıştır, ancak olay örgüsü yapısı, suçun işlendiği yer ve polis dedektiflerinin proaktif yaklaşımı gerçeğin kurguyla harmanlandığını göstermektedir.

### Anahtar Kelimeler:

kentsel suçlar,  
kırsal suçlar,  
polis reformları,  
adli sicil kaydı,  
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## Introduction

With rapid industrialization and urbanization in the nineteenth century, the perception of British people and the approach of legal institutions towards crime witnessed unprecedented change. Metropolitan cities and towns earned the reputation of overly crowded zones infested with criminal activities. This perceptual change could be attributed to factors like massive migration of people, mushrooming of slums, poverty, hunger and the government's apathy towards the poor. Nineteenth and twentieth century novelists conjoined this perceptual transition by intertwining urban crime and its multiple forms with their writings to show how dark and dingy spaces of slums hide criminals with minuscule possibilities of being nabbed by law enforcement agencies.

This article attempts to investigate how Agatha Christie deconstructs traditional conceptual ideologies relating to the location of the crime and the gradual extension of functional areas of investigation agencies in the exterior of towns. The article analyses two novels – *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* and *The Murder at the Vicarage* – to study questions like: how Christie switches the discourses from erstwhile detective stories of localizing crime in metropolitan cities to villages? What motivates Christie to set her crime stories in rural settings? To find answers to these questions, the article has tried to do an interdisciplinary study of crime fiction. It corroborates the analysis with statistics of different types of crimes committed in the nineteenth century. It also gives insight into reforms instituted in the police system to expand the network of security agencies for tackling criminal activities in rural regions.

## Theorizing the Representation of Crime

As literature has its roots in social and cultural spheres, writers institutionalize them to validate public perception. The article uses the theoretical framework of how historical, cultural and social facts made their way into crime fiction. The literary verisimilitude of crime culture gained traction in the nineteenth century to bridge the gap between crime fiction and real-world criminal incidences. The literary representation of the socio-cultural milieu invites readers to contemplate policies and institutional reforms that transform the social order. Marxists have elaborated this representation of social milieu as the transactions between socio-economic and socio-political domains. Engels relates the cross-connection of increased criminal activities with hostility between proletariats and the middle class.

Authors borrow ideas from surroundings, but most often from history<sup>1</sup>, to illustrate how policies, reforms and perceptions are produced, reproduced and disseminated for the sustenance of social order. Clifford Geertz writes that social, economic and political developments affect human

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<sup>1</sup> History is not the compilation of ideas and chronicles but it is an account of incidences and developments in the socio-cultural and politico-economic domains.

activities and, therefore, authors' attempt to embed realism in their writings reflects an exchange between culture and literature:

There is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture which does not mean complexes of concrete behaviour patterns-customs, usages, traditions, habit clusters but rather a set of control mechanisms, plans, recipes, rules, instructions for the governing of behaviour (Greetz 51).

Geertz propounds that culture and humans interplay by exchanging ideas, while Stuart Hall reconfigures the concept of representation as the tool of reconstruction. Hall illustrates that the representation is an act of ideological recreation embodying intended meanings different from literal meanings: "Representation is the production of meaning through language. In representation, we use signs to symbolize, stand for reference or reference of objects, people and events in the so-called real world" (28).

He further exemplifies in the above quotation that representation has gained a prominent place in cultural studies because it is not just the imitation of ideas but a complex process in which discourses produce intentional meanings. These discourses are dynamic, evolving with time and passing from one generation to another.

### **Criminal Offences: Social and Literary Trends**

Sociologists and legal experts have defined urban crimes in relation to their potency and how they affect an individual's personal and public life. Against the backdrop of urbanization and the massive migration of people to cities in the nineteenth century, criminals exploited opportunities to deceive people of their wealth and belongings. Explicating the rising number of criminals and unlawful activities in cities, Stephen Knight argues that the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century reinforced social hierarchy in the countryside whereas industrial hubs and urban centres allow criminals to homogenize with people:

You would not know who your neighbours were, what they did or might do; people would travel long distances for work or pleasure; there would be whole sub-classes, the agents of both violent and white-collar crime, who did no productive work but preyed on the activities of those earning incomes; there would be no-go areas in the city where the violent criminals would lurk, and there would be dangerous encounters at the interfaces between criminal areas and those of the respectable earning folk; equally there would be mysterious establishments of law and finance where crimes of exploitation and extortion were silently committed. The city itself would

be growing beyond comprehension or control: within its bounds, systems of public order, moral order, health, sanitation and even sanity were all at serious risk, and needing massive new systems of regulation and supervision (Knight 5-6).

This quotation exclusively concentrates on how urbanity and crime are tangled with each other but, at the same time, corresponds to the low crime rate in rural areas. Nonetheless, what Knight has attempted to illustrate does not corroborate with Clive Emsley's findings of criminal activities in urban and rural areas. Elucidating the difference between urban and rural crime, Emsley writes:

Rural society is more primitive, had a higher incidence of inter-personal crime than urban areas. In the latter, the dis-organisation created by urban growth, or simply the greater opportunity for theft provided by the urban environment, led to a greater incidence of property crime (Emsley 120).

Emsley characterizes urban crime with topographical and demographic dispersion while rural crime is defined in terms of commonly reported incidences like animal thefts, poaching and property-related conflicts. In rural areas, homicide was, however, the most unreported offence since the rate reached "1 to 100,000 by the end of the 1880s against 1.5 to 100,000 in 1865" (42). Owing to new recruitments and patrolling of police in villages, the reported cases of homicide declined to "350 per year in the 1890s against more than 400 per year between 1857 and 1890" (42).

The representation of crime in major cities remained a prominent feature of detective stories in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Amidst the overwhelming city locales, rural crime sporadically sprinted in the crime fiction of this period. While Arthur Conan Doyle solved the cases of missing people, deception, theft, burglary, murder, conspiracy and ransom, these stories were set in metro cities, urban centres and industrial towns. Dissecting the monotony and calmness of rurality, the famous detective Sherlock Holmes, however, in a conversation with his friend Watson exposes dark and outrageous deeds committed in valleys and country-side:

You look at these scattered houses, and you are impressed by their beauty. I look at them, and the only thought which comes to me is a feeling of their isolation, and of the impunity with which crime may be committed there.

"Good heavens!" I cried. "Who would associate crime with these dear old homesteads?" They always fill me with a certain horror. It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the

smiling and beautiful countryside. The pressure of public opinion can do in the town what the law cannot accomplish. There is no lane so vile that the scream of a tortured child, or the thud of a drunkard's blow, does not beget sympathy and indignation among the neighbours, and then the whole machinery of justice is ever so close that a word of complaint can set it going, and there is but a step between the crime and the dock. But look at these lonely houses, each in its own fields, filled for the most part with poor ignorant folk who know little of the law. Think of the deeds of hellish cruelty, the hidden wickedness which may go on, year in, year out, in such places, and none the wiser (Doyle 300).

These lines show that the country houses do not represent a peaceful environment but witness some of the most insidious crimes. Christie seems to have captured devious and appalling crimes to unveil escalating rate of criminal activities, especially homicide, in pastoral Britain during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Analyzing detective stories within this theoretical and social framework, we find that Christie uses fiction as a trope to represent British society. She familiarizes her readers with the dark side of rural areas of twentieth-century Britain. Since Christie spent her life before marriage at Ashfield on the northern edge of Torquay, she was accustomed to heinous crimes committed in this region. Her attempt to divert attention from industrial towns to villages is to show that criminal discourses in rural areas run parallel with their counterparts in cities. External factors also played vital roles in deconstructing the myth that the countryside witnesses low levels of crime. Among these factors, the establishment of new institutions for research on crimes unmasked the uglier truth of rural districts that remained obscured from the public gaze until the early decades of the twentieth century.

Christie seems to have restrained from openly grappling with reforms in the British police system but created police detectives to reflect on the police reforms implemented throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The presentation of police detectives in her early stories replicates the institutionalization of the security system in response to emerging threats from criminals. The institutionalization of the police system has its manifestation in the trend of maintaining criminal records initiated at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In this line, several European countries established Central Statistics Offices for crimes in the first half of the nineteenth century. Britain also constituted the *Royal Statistical Society* and launched the *Journal of the Statistical Society* published in 1837.

Another reason for assessing Christie's murder mysteries in the backdrop of police reforms is the impact of policy changes on crime literature that enables readers to sketch parallels between real and fiction. Detective stories borrowed facts from real-life incidents. Emphasizing the integration of factual details in crime fiction, Haycraft argues:

Real crimes and detection have sometimes been used as an inspiration for detective stories, but further noted that characters, style, dialogue, and setting have been transformed so as to fit the fictional format. That is, even though the sense of reality appears to be one that is essential to the detective novel, certain adjustments to how the real event was like, or might have been like, need be made since the detective genre has a certain format it needs to fit into (Haycraft 228-9).

Crime fiction, as Haycraft comprehends, is an exercise in which authors put together multiple forces that persuade them to consciously create fiction out of reality. These forces might not present themselves as the main determinants but allude to their sources. Christie's two novels analyzed in this paper mirror the impact of the police reforms on crime culture in rural Britain.

### ***The Mysterious Affair at Styles* – Nature of Crimes, Location and Police Indulgence**

*The Mysterious Affair at Styles* is a murder story in which Emily Inglethorp is found dead in her room. Strychnine, a deadly poison, was added to her medicine by Alfred Inglethorp (her second husband) and Emily Howard. In the beginning, John Cavendish and Lawrence Cavendish (her stepsons from the first marriage) are the prime suspects. On the day of her death, Emily argued with someone in her room after which she probably made a new will. When Inspector Japp of Scotland Yard investigates the case, his suspicion falls on Alfred, but Poirot intervenes and explains that the evidence would not prove him guilty. In the end, Poirot restores order in society by revealing the identities of murderers.

Christie's endeavour to concentrate on rural crime conjoined with her personal life, including the motivation from her mother and visit to Dartmoor. The descriptions of places in *The Mysterious Affair at Style* indicate the continuously increasing criminal activities in rural areas. It is not only the story of the murder of a middle-class woman but also exposes the farcical nature of peace embedded in rusticity. In addition, Christie embroils rurality deeply in the text so that even characters establish unique relationships with the village. Arthur Hastings visits the nearby village of St. Mary to seek the aid of his friend Hercule Poirot who escapes from the crowded town to spend his remaining life in rural tranquillity. St. Mary is a fictional village situated far from the only

main railway station and outwardly serene:

The village of Styles St Mary was situated about two miles from the little station, and Styles Court lay a mile the other side of it. It was a still, warm day in early July. As one looked out over the flat Essex country, lying so green and peaceful under the afternoon sun, it seemed almost impossible to believe that, not so very far away, a great war was running its appointed course (Christie 13).

Christie seems to have satirized the location by contrasting it with the places where the First World War was fought, causing psychological anxieties and pushing people into an existential crisis. She has tried to interlace the ending of the First World War with the rising number of criminal activities. As the War destroyed industries that employed people in cities, the rural regions were burdened with unemployed youths returning to their homelands. Although there is no explicit correlation between crime and the War, Christie conjoins the War with its psychological repercussion on people, especially soldiers, returning from the battleground where they had witnessed bloodshed that deeply affected their psychological state. Besides, the War placed law-abiding people against law offenders. The War forced people to search for peace in remote locations. For instance: Arthur Hasting preferred to live in solitude as the bucolic tranquillity heals the psychological wounds of the War. He reciprocates affirmatively to John Cavendish:

I'm afraid you'll find it quiet down here, Hastings.'

'My dear fellow, that's just what I want' (Christie 13).

This embodiment of quietness in Styles is a parody of the public perception that remoteness proportionally reduces crime. People flock to these places for mental peace and to escape public recognition. Issues related to privacy, security and psychological solace that pushed people out of cities to remote locations continued even after their displacement in the post-war era.

In the 1890s, Britain observed a transition in its tackling of offenders from "the anthropological approach towards psychiatry and medico-legal approach" (Kreseda & Byrne, 74) that pressurized the British judicial system to eliminate discrimination in legal rights. Furthermore, university departments initiated data analysis on rural crimes and published reports which were printed in newspapers and magazines<sup>2</sup> for the consumption of the masses. These newspapers enabled people to access criminal records that shed light on the types and volumes of crimes committed in the past. One such record was compiled by Rawson W. Rawson, a statistician,

<sup>2</sup> There was no official launch of journals of criminology in the early decades but in the later decades, several journals started including *The British Journal of Delinquency* in 1950. For the study of crime and its various facets, the Institute for the Scientific Treatment of Delinquency (ISTD) was founded in 1932. In 1941, the Department of Criminal Science at Cambridge University instituted on the behest of the UK Home office.



disclosing various types of offences committed in metro cities and villages. Not much difference was observed in the statistics of rural and metropolitan crimes:

Table 1

Rawson's compilation

S. No	Description of Offenses	Agricultural	Manufacturing	Metropolitan Cities
1	Sexual	0.79	1.07	1.00
2	Malicious Against the Property	1.58	0.85	1.08
3	Malicious Against the Person	0.80	0.91	1.21
4	Larceny	0.95	1.15	1.23
5	Fraud	0.84	1.11	1.08

Source – An Inquiry into the Statistics of Crime in England and Wales (1839)

\*Read each crime as a unit

Although the tabulated data exhibits that rural districts recorded a high number of property crimes compared to metros in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the same trend was observed in other types of crimes like larceny, fraud, and sexual offences. Heather Worthington in *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* describes that the number of criminal incidences spiralled rapidly towards the end of the nineteenth century owing to mitigating economic disparities between rural and urban areas. There was an upsurge, Worthington says, in rural crime between the two wars because soldiers returning from the battlefields were under financial burdens and the conventional sources of income were either almost finished or taken over by the opposite gender:

While the city remains the preferred location for much crime fiction, especially in America, in Britain, from the 1920s and 30s on, there has been a tendency to locate crime in small communities, either rural or within yet separated from the city (Worthington 35).

Contextualizing Christie's murder mysteries with Rawson's statistical figures and Worthington's inference, the depiction of rural crimes in her writings was an intentional endeavour emulating the transition across the social spectrum. Another point of critical appreciation in Christie's detective stories is the involvement of the police and its investigation mechanisms. Whereas the private detective retains his public image as a person with peculiar qualities, Christie has given credit to

police officers for their contributions to solving mysteries. Unlike the nineteenth-century literary trend of showing an amateur detective in competition with the state police, Christie has moderated their enmity. In the story, they cooperate and exchange information at critical junctures. Christie reshapes the relationship between police and detective as if it were based on mutual trust and collective efforts depicted in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* in which Poirot and Inspector Japp worked together in the past:

I fear you do not remember me, Inspector Japp.

'Why, if it isn't Mr. Poirot!' cried the Inspector. He turned to the other man. 'You've heard me speak of Mr. Poirot? It was in 1904, he and I worked together – the Abercrombie forgery case – you remember, he was run down in Brussels. Ah, those were great days, Moosier. Then, do you remember "Baron" Altara? There was a pretty rogue for you! He eluded the clutches of half the police in Europe. But we nailed him in Antwerp – thanks to Mr Poirot here' (Christie 147).

These reminiscences concretize the assumption that Christie embraces the police for its fleet of investigators who are capable of solving cases and known for employing modern investigation techniques. The competence of the police is authenticated by the fact that detective Poirot was a part of this system. After a long career, Poirot retired from the police and practiced as a private investigator: "I was sorry to see, now limped badly, had been in his time one of the most celebrated members of the Belgian police. As a detective, his flair had been extraordinary, and he had achieved triumphs by unravelling some of the most baffling cases of the day" (Christie 35).

Although Christie captures disagreement between the police and private detective, this incongruity results in contestation and competition to prove their superiority. There are instances when Poirot takes a stand completely different from Inspector Japp, but they are the points of intervention to explain that a wrong conclusion would lead to injustice. This contestation between inspector Japp and Poirot is aptly captured as:

'It can be done,' he said at last. 'I admit I do not wish it. It forces my hand. I would have preferred to work in the dark just for the present, but what you say is very just – the word of a Belgian policeman, whose day is past, is not enough! And Alfred Inglethorp must not be arrested. That I have sworn, as my friend Hastings here knows. See, then, my good Japp, you go at once to Styles?' (Christie 150).

In this conversation, Poirot warns inspector Japp not to arrest Mr. Inglethorp because the evidence

and witnesses would not prove him guilty. Despite a warning from Poirot, Inspector Japp takes Mr. Ingelthorp into custody on the conviction that he has motives and reasons to kill his wife. This act confirms that inspector Japp is an over-confident and haughty policeman.

Christie seems to have deliberately presented Inspector Japp as an arrogant and proud policeman to highlight the police reforms<sup>3</sup> implemented in the early decades of the twentieth century. These reforms prescribed educational qualifications, physical and aptitude tests that stress on investigation techniques in the recruitment process. Inspector Japp believes in his investigation methods and propounds that his team should get the credit for solving the mystery.

Although Inspector Japp jumps to conclusions without combining facts and evidence, there have been occasions when he considers Poirot's suggestions carefully. This partnership helps in solving the mystery and at one instant, Poirot requests Inspector Japp to use his power and ask everyone in the house to be present for interrogation:

Poirot had conferred with Japp in a low tone on the way up, and it was the latter functionary who requested that the household, with the exception of the servants, should be assembled together in the drawing room. I realized the significance of this. It was Poirot to make his boast good (Christie 160).

Christie has taken the partnership of Poirot and Inspector Japp to a level that both of them give preference to their duties which indicates how the police and security agencies strengthen for the containment of crime and criminals.

### ***The Murder at the Vicarage: Crime Location, Police Reforms and Their Impact***

Christie has set the story of *The Murder at the Vicarage* in St. Mary Mead- a countryside where Colonel Lucius Protheroe was found dead in a church. Although Colonel Protheroe discharged the duties of churchwarden and local magistrate in the village, he was neither liked by his second wife nor by his daughter from the first marriage. Everyone had a reason to kill him. When the news of his death spread throughout the village, his acquaintances became pretentious. In the village, untoward incidences instantaneously turn into sensational news “to have someone like Colonel Protheroe murdered actually in the Vicarage study is such a feast of sensation as rarely falls to the lot of a village population” (Christie 154). Inspector Slack interrogated the villagers who shared their assumptions and scepticism concerning the murder. Driven by her curiosity, Miss Marple initiated the private investigation of the case without intervening in the police procedure. When Rev. Clement discussed the murder with Miss Marple, she revealed seven possible suspects –

<sup>3</sup>C. Emsley writes in *The English Police: A Political and Social History* about reforms implemented during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Emsley explains specific attention to the training and recruitment process.

Archer, Mary, Lettice Protheroe, Dennis, Griselda, Clement and Hawes – but all proved innocent. In the end, Lawrence Redding and Anne Protheroe confessed to committing the murder.

Analyzing the description of locality, it has been found that Christie has scratched off the mask of peace and tranquillity from the rural region by capturing the reaction of the villagers who have not seen crimes in their vicinity; “we are not used to mysteries in St. Mary Mead” (Christie 24) While the narrative structure credits less number of crimes in the village to low population and people’s familiarity with each other, “in St. Mary Mead, everyone knows each other,” (Christie 24) Christie asserts that even “in this quiet one-horse village” (80) murders are not rare. However, whenever any mischief or crime occurs, the news spreads rapidly which is evident in Griselda’s comment on Miss Marple:

“She's the worst cat in the village,” said Griselda.

“And she always knows every single thing that happens and draws the worst inferences from it.” (Christie 9)

This remark reveals inquisitive tendencies in Miss Marple. She is a woman who has earned a notorious reputation among the villagers for transgressing the threshold of womanhood and venturing into a profession considered unsuitable for her gender. With increasing modernization and materialization, the village was closely connected to towns and observed incidences not akin to its past. This transition in the village’s sociability is referred to in Mrs. Price Ridley’s conversation with colonel Melchett: “Very strange things have been happening in this village lately....strange things indeed. Colonel Protheroe was going to look into them, and what happened to him, poor man? Perhaps I shall be the next?” (Christie 112).

Moreover, Christie seems to have encapsulated the well-managed police system in rural districts with people expressing their faith in the law enforcement agencies like Scotland Yard. With the extension of power and new recruitments of officers, Scotland Yard not only enhanced its network but was also successful in changing the perception of people to look at it as an institution constituted for ensuring peace and stability in the society. Scotland Yard built confidence among people through its robust investigation mechanism to rein perpetrators in both urban and rural areas. The empowerment of Scotland Yard and police networks in Britain was the outcome of the laws passed by the British Parliament in the nineteenth century. These laws ensured financial stability, improved management and expanded the police force in rural districts.

Although the history of police and law enforcement agencies in Britain goes back to the last decades of the eighteenth century, the Glasgow Police Act 1800 and the Metropolitan Police Act 1829 initiated new chapters in the arena of civilian security and crime control. Initially, the two acts

were implemented in the cities and the rural regions were excluded under the pretext of low crime rate. The British Parliament passed the Rural Police Act of 1839 to cover the countryside. In 1859, an amendment was made to the Act to establish police forces in rural districts compulsorily. As the number of crimes escalated in the country with the increasing population and industrialization, metropolitan police opened the department of detection in 1842 to investigate grave crimes.

These Acts were reformed considerably throughout the nineteenth century to tackle crimes and enforce public order. The reason for amendments in the Acts could be attributed to overseas colonial annexation and burgeoning trade that gave an unprecedented impetus to the country's economy. With changing demographics of the country on the back of rapid industrialization and migration, Britain's socio-economic and politico-cultural domains were immensely affected apparently by the sporadic emergence of slums.

The British authorities framed policies and regulations throughout the nineteenth century to curtail criminal offences, but the situation of law and order deteriorated during the First World War when soldiers returned home from the frontiers. In the second decade of the twentieth century, the British Parliament passed the Special Constables Act 1914 to overcome the paucity of constables in the police force. When the Act was implemented in 1914, some temporary provisions were inducted which were incorporated into the Act in 1923 through an amendment.

Christie has not explicitly referred to the reforms in the British police, but narrative structures, plots, dialogues and contests between private detectives and state police reflect how her stories are borrowed and intensely influenced by the developments in the external world. Advanced investigation mechanisms, highly trained officers, hierarchy, the training of constables and special departments are some of the tropes employed to show the impact of reforms on security agencies. These elements, on the one hand, have emphasized the modernization and expansion of the police force in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and, on the other hand, replicate the rapidly transforming conceptualization of crime in fiction.

Analysing the representation of the police in *The Murder at the Vicarage*, it has been found that law enforcement agencies reach into the interior parts of the country. Institutional hierarchy in the police is reflected in the statements of Constable Hurst who receives the news of a murder in St Mary Mead and informs about his limitations owing to institutional procedure "the inspector will be here any minute. In the meantime, I'll follow out his instructions" (Christie 42). Since the hierarchical system functions as the scaffolding of the police and adds credibility to the mechanism, people show faith in modern investigation techniques and are confident of the system's capabilities to punish perpetrators. Under the rubric of the reformed police system, the investigation

techniques become popular among people who imitate them in their daily routines. Dennis, the cousin of Rev. Clement, searches the place of the murder and finds footprints which, he believes, are key to identifying the murderer: “Dennis came in and was full of excitement over a footprint he had found in one of the flower beds. He was sure that the police had overlooked it and that it would turn out to be turning point of the mystery” (Christie 50).

Dennis's inquisitive behaviour and his responses to the murder are endorsed by Griselda, approving the fact that he “fancies himself as an amateur detective. He is very excited about a footprint he found in one of the flowerbeds and I fancy has gone off to tell the police about it.” (Christie 51).

This kind of excitement exhibits the cordial relationship between the police and people, who are willing to cooperate in the investigation but have certain expectations from the system, apparent from the conversation between Mrs. Price Ridley and the chief constable Melchett. Mrs Ridley raises her concerns and says “glad some notice is being taken of the occurrence (murder). Disgraceful, I call it; simply disgraceful” (Christie 109). At the same time, Mrs. Ridley holds the police responsible for the investigation and categorically remarks, “that's your business. It's the business of the police. What do we pay rates and taxes for, I should like to know?” (Christie 109).

Christie has praised the expanding network of the state police and its professionalism. Unlike the late nineteenth-century detective stories that ridicule the police system, Christie has highlighted the professional etiquettes of the investigating officer and the chief constable as trained detectives:

Inspector Slack arrived, having come by car from Much Benham, two miles away. All that I can say of inspector Slack is that never did a man more determinedly strive to contradict his name. He was a dark man, restless and energetic in manner, with black eyes that snapped ceaselessly. His manner was rude and overbearing in the extreme.....the inspector busied himself for some time peering at the things on the table and examining the pool of blood (Christie 43).

The professional capabilities of Inspector Slack and chief constable Melchett are reflected in their approach toward work. Inspector Slack examines the location of the murder closely and collects details minutely to draw the sequence of events. His capabilities are further exemplified in the interrogation of suspects. Owing to his professional training, Inspector Slack embodies the traits of an ardent detective who believes in conviction and evidence to incriminate culprits. His empirical approach does not allow the investigation to be affected by personal instincts or ideological biases:

“It has struck me as curious all along that inspector Slack never seems to have any personal views of his own on the murder. The easiness or difficulty of getting conviction is the only points that seem to appeal to him” (Christie 216).

While constructing the character of Inspector, Christie impinges arrogance and vanity in Slack. Although these characteristics portray him as an overconfident and ignoble officer, the kind of perseverance to fulfill his duties sets him apart from the police officers. Mr. Clement appreciates the commitment and enthusiasm of Inspector Slack to arrest the murderer:

The next thing is to find out what everyone was doing that evening between six and seven. Everyone at Old Hall, I mean, and pretty well everyone in the village as well.”

I gave a sigh.

“What wonderful energy you have, Inspector Slack.”

“I believe in hard work” (Christie 113).

While arranging the events chronologically, Inspector Slack inquires about all the suspects so that his theory of murder remains unchallenged and errorless. His investigation techniques, though exhibit professional ethics, become intolerable and agonizing “Inspector Slack is going up to the Old Hall this afternoon, and will probably make the life of everybody there quite unbearable to them in his efforts to get at the truth” (Christie 121). His manners are rude, “civility to my mind, is an art which Inspector Slack has never learnt, but I presume that according to his own lights, civil he had been” (Christie 134). Inspector Slack does not reconsider his manners, and people think of him as someone who “seemed to be a little ashamed of himself for his brusqueness” (Christie 135). Despite these deleterious attributes of Inspector Slack, the mystery of Colonel Protheroe’s murder is solved in which his contribution could not be neglected:

The trial of Lawrence Redding and Anne Protheroe is a matter of public knowledge. I do not propose to go into it. I will only mention that great credit was reflected upon Inspector Slack, whose zeal and intelligence had resulted in the criminal being brought to justice (Christie 268).

Christie ends the story with the appreciation of Inspector Slack for his zeal to book the criminals for the murder and to ensure justice for the victim. It is the victory of the police that receives the support of the people contributing to the investigation and showing faith in the system.

### **Conclusion**

Christie demonstrates in the two stories that crime discards cultural, demographical, social,

economic and geographical disparities. It can happen in the remotest region and in the most unexpected conditions. Murder, theft, ransom and burglary, which were uncommon in the countryside of Britain, began to be reported at a much higher rate in the nineteenth century. As criminal incidences escalated in Britain in the post-industrial era, the need for a police system intensified. With the fast expansion of the police network, people felt more secure and safe. Police contributed tremendously to rein criminals and to provide a secure environment even in remote locations. On the back of new recruitments, professional training and consistent reforms, the police system of Britain not only strengthen but also built confidence among people for better social and economic life. People trusted the police and judicial institutions to establish order and peace.

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